

The Fulfillment of the Law

Jeremiah 50:38b

- I. It is obvious to everyone that the United States is becoming more and more a land of images, mad over idols. Images of advertising: the seductive female, the wealthy playboy, the family that finds its happiness through having a new car, a house in the woods, a vacation in the Bahamas. As we fail to live up to these false images, our own life loses value, and the people either tend to despair or take drugs or alcohol to supply some sort of fantasy. And usually those who do somehow, temporarily, achieve the image – the model, the movie star, the upper class family – end up in despair also, because the images themselves are false and misleading. Why? As the prophet knew, because they lead us away from God.
- II. What is the nature of our images? Actually, anything in which we place ultimate concern or authority acts as our god (Paul Tillich was a theologian who taught this). Of course, for many the ultimate concern is money, fame, knowledge. These are fairly easily recognized as false idols. Thus, though they are a problem, they are not the most serious problem.
- III. The most serious problem is the idol that comes closest to resembling God, to giving us hope that it is the source of our salvation. It would be something very beneficial, to which we would cling tenaciously; therefore it would be the greatest obstacle to the authority of God. For America, what is that ultimate idol? The law!
- IV. Like Rome, the United States is very advanced in its legal system. Actually, the establishment of the American legal system was one of the breakthroughs in the history of legal development, a virtual revolution in the function of law in society. And law has served our society well over the decades.
- V. I am not advocating the abolition of law. Law is wonderful. However, law is not salvation. Law will never lead to the perfection of a society. Laws tend to multiply themselves. In the Puritan days, if a town needed a lawyer it was felt that the minister of that town had failed in his responsibility. If people need to resort to courts and laws, it means that Christian love has broken down in some fundamental way.

- VI. Today, if you look at the statute books of a city or state, you see that there are laws governing every moment, every possible activity, of your life. We have so many laws that most people cannot make a move without consulting a lawyer. (Newsweek a few months ago had a cover story on our litigious society. You might want to find that issue for some good examples.)
- VII. And yet, it is human beings who are in fact dominant over laws. Human beings make laws, they bend them, they abuse them. Political power can always get around laws, if public opinion allows it. For example, the public opinion was against Reverend Moon; it expressed itself through the enforcement of a law, but the reality was not the issue of law but public sentiment. Many people violate laws so flagrantly, without any trouble, because people don't care. Undoubtedly many of those who condemned Reverend Moon use illegal drugs, and have no respect for the law in that area. Laws can attack people just as easily as protect them.
- VIII. What this means is that Law is an image. It is something that looks very substantial, but is only a façade for what human beings ultimately want to do, to enable them to do those things.
- IX. This is why God's nation that centered upon the law – the Old Testament Israelites – were not complete. The law was not the final answer: the final answer was Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the law. He did not abolish the law, but he fulfilled it.
- X. But then people with stubborn, ignorant hearts used the law against him. It is a perfect example of how the law is an image, an idol, good or evil only as much as the people who use the law. The law of Israel was a good thing up until it was used against Christ. It was a good thing except when self-righteous people used their obedience to the law as a ticket to heaven, and as a hammer to bludgeon other people not as well educated or meticulous as they.
- XI. Thus, when the people sought to stone the prostitute, Jesus revealed that they were only using the law to mask their violence and vengeful nature. They were being hypocrites, judging another by laws which they themselves did not fulfill. And is not the same true, likely, in half the court cases in this country? People accusing each other of crime no worse than crime they themselves commit? And don't we often feel self-righteous when we read of a criminal being punished, when we do nothing to rectify the conditions that make crime so abundant?

- XII. As the nation that lives by the sword shall die by the sword, so too shall the nation that lives by the law shall die by the law. For, as Christ teaches us, there is something more powerful than law, higher than law; God's love. Where God's love abounds, we are beyond the law. Not that we ignore the law, but in God's love we naturally, spontaneously fulfill the law, because we understand the spirit of the law, which is trust, selflessness, sacrifices, service. Social service is fulfilling the spirit of the law. In a society where we give sacrificially to help those less fortunate than us, will there be crime? Will we have overloaded courts and jails?
- XIII. Thus America must go beyond this final idol of law, and become a society based upon God's love and truth, expressed through the sacrificial lives of its people.